

Myths and Facts About the Flu Vaccine

**VALUE
HEALTH**
PROTECT AGAINST
INFLUENZA

Myth: *You can get the flu from the flu vaccine.*

Fact: You cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine. The flu shot contains only inactive viruses — those that have been killed. The nasal spray contains live viruses but they are too weak to cause the disease. Some people do have side effects such as body aches or a low fever after receiving the vaccine, but they do not have flu.

Myth: *You can get flu from the nasal spray vaccine.*

Fact: You cannot get flu from the nasal spray vaccine. The vaccine contains viruses that are too weak to cause illness. There have been some reports of flu-like symptoms appearing, mostly in children, after getting vaccinated, but these are not the same as the flu.

Myth: *The flu vaccine doesn't work.*

Fact: In most years, the flu vaccine prevents flu for between 70 percent and 90 percent of vaccinated healthy people under the age of 65. Sometimes, people who get other illnesses that have flu-like symptoms think the flu vaccine has not worked, when in fact they do not have influenza.

Myth: *If you get a flu vaccine you can't get an influenza virus.*

Fact: Flu vaccines are made to protect against the most likely strains of flu circulating in a given year. But there is no guarantee that those will be the only strains circulating, and it is possible to get a flu vaccine and still come down with another strain of flu for which you are not protected. The vaccine may also not be 100 percent effective against the strains of the flu it contains. That depends largely on the age and health of the person vaccinated.

Myth: *The flu isn't serious enough to warrant vaccination.*

Fact: Most people who get seasonal flu do not have complications, but for some, complications can be severe. Approximately 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths a year are attributed to complications of seasonal flu.

Myth: *If I don't get vaccinated in the fall, I shouldn't bother because it will be too late.*

Fact: The best time to get vaccinated is in October or November — before flu season starts. But flu season can peak as late as May, so the Virginia Department of Health vaccinates from October through April, or longer if necessary.

Myth: *There is a limited supply of vaccine, so you should leave it for those who really need it.*

Fact: Manufacturers project there will be between 110 and 115 million doses of flu vaccine available in the U.S. for the upcoming flu season — the most vaccine ever available in a single flu season. Public health and government officials believe there will be enough vaccine available for everyone who wants to be vaccinated.

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Myth: Absolutely everybody should get the flu vaccine.

Fact: There is an extremely limited group of people who should not get either kind of flu vaccine. Specifically, people with a history of allergy to eggs and those who have had a rare illness called Guillaine-Barre Syndrome should not get the flu vaccine.

Myth: I've already had the flu, therefore I am immune.

Fact: Flu viruses change frequently. Immunities you have built up to one strain of flu virus are not likely to protect you entirely from another strain.

Myth: I got vaccinated last year so I'm protected this year.

Fact: Because flu viruses adapt and change regularly, the vaccine is different from year to year. Also, immunity wears off, so even if the viruses are similar from year to year, it's important to renew the shot annually.

Myth: I'm healthy lower age/my child is healthy. Therefore we don't need the flu shot.

Fact: Healthy people are less likely to catch any virus because their bodies are in a better position to combat the flu. However, it is still possible for a healthy person to get the flu.

Myth: The flu vaccine can cause autism.

Fact: Most flu shots contain thimerosal, a preservative that contains mercury and some people believe is related to developmental disorders. A 2004 Institute of Medicine report found

no causal relationship between thimerosal and autism. If you are concerned, however, ask your doctor for assistance in finding a vaccine without thimerosal. The nasal spray vaccine does not contain thimerosal.

Myth: The flu vaccine is not safe for young children or pregnant women.

Fact: The flu vaccine injection is safe and recommended for children over six months and for pregnant women.

Myth: You don't need to get vaccinated because there are drugs now that keep you from getting the flu.

Fact: There are prescription drugs on the market that may prevent flu in some healthy adults if they are taken every day there is flu present in the community. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that these drugs be used to supplement flu vaccine, not in place of it, except in circumstances where an individual cannot be given the vaccine because of other health conditions. Antiviral medication may also lessen the symptoms of flu or make you less contagious after you have contracted the flu.

Myth: If you get the nasal spray vaccine, you can get other people sick with the flu even though you are protected.

Fact: It is extremely rare but it is possible to become infected with vaccine virus after close contact with a person who has received the nasal-spray vaccine. However, the person who contracts the virus is unlikely to have symptoms of flu because the vaccine contains viruses that are too weak.